



Carbon blinkers and policy blindness: The difficulties of ‘Growing Our Woodland in Wales’

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ABSTRACT

The need for climate change mitigation has led to a recent upsurge in policies aimed to deliver re-forestation across the globe, but with mixed successes observed depending upon the levels of private land ownership and ability of governments to engage land managers. This paper evaluates a new government-led scheme in Wales, which is intended to increase woodland cover from 14% to 20% by 2030 to offset the greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture. As the scheme is primarily intended to promote woodland creation on farms, the analysis of the paper focusses upon the question of how to incentivise farmers, and the reasons why difficulties have been experienced engaging land owners in the scheme. Whilst a number of recommendations are made from this policy evaluation, the paper also demonstrates that key lessons have not been applied from existing literature on farmers' behaviour and environmental scheme uptake, and that policy makers are not integrating practice across departmental divisions. As such, the paper suggests that the new focus on carbon sequestration has acted as a distraction to the development of a more robust governance strategy that builds on previous successes and failures in agri-environment policy.

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Introduction

Woodland creation and afforestation have long been mainstay activities for conservation organisations across the globe. But they have become an increasing priority in recent years due to the opportunities of financing from Clean Development Mechanisms, emission reductions and carbon off-set schemes, and payments attached to the delivery of ecosystem services (Boyd, 2009; Corbera and Schroeder, 2011; Schreuder, 2009). Whilst these developments have often been focussed in the Global South (e.g. Anderson and Zerriffi, 2012; Corbera and Jover, 2012), it is now evident that countries in the North are also exploring opportunities for re-forestation within their own domestic territories (Nijnik and Bizikova, 2008). This has had important consequences for forestry and woodland policies that have previously been geared towards timber production, biodiversity, and recreational ends, with a new focus upon the carbon sequestration potential of forests and woodland cover leading to increased prioritisation and funding for tree-planting. Nevertheless, this increasing political interest has not necessarily led to an increased level of tree cover, as the priorities of private land owners have to be negotiated in many instances.

This paper addresses this issue by focussing upon the case of a scheme in Wales (UK), called Glastir Woodland Creation, outlining

the reasons why there have been difficulties engaging land owners in the scheme. These findings build on an extensive literature on participation in voluntary agri-environment schemes (e.g. Morris and Potter, 1995; Wilson and Hart, 2000), highlighting the ways in which established best practise from these policy frameworks could be transferred to new objectives for carbon management. Critically, the experiences of this scheme show that key lessons have not been applied from the existing literature and policy makers are not integrating practice across departmental divisions. As such, the paper suggests that the new focus on carbon sequestration has acted as a distraction to the development of a more robust governance strategy that builds on previous successes and failures in agri-environment policy.

Given that the Glastir Woodland Creation scheme is primarily intended to initiate tree planting on farms, a key message that the paper advances is the need for greater integration between farming and forestry cultures and practice.

Most of the planned increase in woodland cover in Wales is likely to come from new woodlands on farmland, providing important ecosystem services, such as water management, habitat creation, timber production, and local sources of fuel.
(Welsh Government, 2009)

Consequently, whilst the paper argues that woodland creation should be presented as an important farm diversification strategy, financial incentives are not enough on their own. Hence, there is a need for greater emphasis upon points of cultural connection,

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with knowledge exchange and extension services to support this. Equally, the perceived legitimacy of carbon management measures needs to be improved by implementing more coherent measures that address these concerns across the lifecycle of the farm business. Both of these points are particularly pertinent in light of the increasing global interest in Green Economy measures and the forthcoming reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which are creating new pressures and opportunities for innovation and change in farm businesses across Europe.

However, instead of increased investment in extension and knowledge exchange, the paper demonstrates that the new Glastir woodland scheme has actually involved a move towards a remotely administered and 'self-service' model of participation, with less project officer support and greater responsibility devolved to farmers. Whilst this shift can be related to the current economic climate, it has had notable impacts upon the way in which environmental schemes are being administered by reversing the progress that was beginning to be made through the work of conservation officers in the former Tir Gofal Scheme and the Farm Wildlife Advisory Group. In light of these issues, the paper argues that policy makers have failed to capitalise on the findings of previous research into agri-environment policy, and instead they have reproduced, and at worse exacerbated, many longstanding problems.

In terms of the paper's structure, the following section outlines some broad observations from the existing literature on farmers' decision making, which inform the analysis of the 4th and 5th sections. The third section details the methodology employed. The fourth section then turns to the case study, providing an evaluation of the Glastir Woodland Creation scheme. The paper concludes with a number of policy recommendations, in the 5th section, which are connected to the wider points about environmental policy development outlined above.

Farmers' decision making – a review of the literature

The question of farmers' decision making has received a substantial amount of attention over the last 20 years, given longstanding concerns about the need to encourage participation in voluntary agri-environment schemes, emerging from successive rounds of CAP reform, which have aimed to curb the worst excesses of intensive agriculture (e.g. Defra, 2008; Knowler and Bradshaw, 2007; Wilson and Hart, 2000). Usefully, given the format and intended audience of the Glastir Woodland Creation Scheme, there are a number of connections and lessons that can be learned from this literature which will be outlined below. However, before we consider this more extensive body of literature, it is important to consider a smaller body of research that has focussed explicitly on the question of farmers' attitudes to forestry within the UK (e.g. Bishop, 1992; Scambler, 1989; Watkins et al., 1996).

Attitudes to forestry

Here, it is important to make a distinction between post-War policies to plant large scale plantations and more recent schemes which have worked alongside the agri-environment schemes noted above; although it is evident that both have been unpopular. The earlier plantations were seen as a blight on the landscape, and resisted strongly by the farming community who felt aggrieved by the compulsory purchase orders that this policy involved. In contrast, later policies were much less aggressive in their objectives, but were still affected by the cultural divisions that had then emerged between forestry and farming. In addition, Watkins et al. (1996) outline that a broadly negative attitude towards woodland planting has also been promoted by the poor economic returns of conversion to woodland and lack of sufficient grant supports. A

clear conclusion, therefore, emerges that farmers are not prepared to be foresters.

Looking at the correlation between farm/farmer types and woodland scheme uptake, Crabtree et al. (1998) outline that demographic variables are not a useful indicator, but farm size (European Size Unit) and type can provide a useful indication. Specifically, their analysis demonstrates that farms with systems that work well alongside woodland are more likely to participate in schemes; for example, poor quality agricultural land used for extensive livestock production. Equally, farms with existing woodland are more likely to participate in schemes. These findings show clear overlaps with wider understandings of agri-environment scheme participation and demonstrate the importance of aligning the two literatures.

Within Wales, the most recent data available on farmers' attitudes to forestry is a survey commissioned by the Forestry Commission in Wales, in 2009 (Wavehill Consulting, 2009). This presents data from 264 farmers with woodland on their land, focussing on the management of their woodland and their utilisation of woodland grant schemes. Whilst the majority (93%) of farmers were using, and actively managing their woods in some way, it was also evident that 23% farmers did not know about the grant schemes on offer, and 83% felt that they needed further information on how to manage their woods. In addition, it was notable that farmers were not using their woodlands as a source of income, with only 2% stating that they were selling firewood. Combined with a high proportion of barriers noted by farmers, including prohibitive costs (identified by 48%) and lack of time to conduct management (identified by 63%), it is evident that the majority of farmers in Wales are not proactively engaging with woodland management.

Nevertheless, more recent research in Scotland (Morgan-Davies et al., 2008) does point to the potential of combining woodland and forestry in a more multifunctional approach, demonstrating a more positive attitude of farmers towards agro-forestry techniques which enable them to maintain their core farming practises and cultural attachments. This is a key theme that I will return to in the analysis of the 4th section.

Agri-environment participation

Reiterating the importance of established culture and practice upon farmers' decision making, the wider literature on agri-environment participation similarly highlights the role of identity, cultural norms, and social context (Blackstock et al., 2007; Burton, 2004). These factors are discussed in the literature as 'internal' influences, whereas financial incentives and government regulation are seen as 'external' factors. This focus upon internal factors can be seen to work within a broader research context of developments into behaviour change (Jones et al., 2011; The Institute for Government, 2010), which emphasises that people are not simply rational economic actors and hence there is a need to understand other influences upon behaviour. Notably, this thinking has been influential upon the UK Government's farm engagement strategy (see Defra, 2008). Nevertheless, it is clear that economic priority is still central to farmers, if not always the final determinant of decisions (Burton and Wilson, 2006). Here, it is important to stress that decisions are often made because they are *perceived* to make business sense, but this can be done without recourse to concrete financial analyses. As the WRO (2010) farm household survey demonstrates, the majority of farmers in Wales do not carry-out formal business planning (only 20% do); and many admit to simply checking their bank balance once a year as an indication of the farm's finances (WRO, 2012).

In addition, the literature emphasises the temporal nature of decisions (e.g. Blackstock et al., 2007), suggesting that behavioural patterns are not fixed and that changes in context will affect

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